

west hartford LIFE

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Vinyl and vacuum tubes


Vintage Hi-Fi Museum preserves the past
See story on page 4



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QUOTE OF NOTE:

"Food is the number one material sent to landfills. We throw out 40 percent of our food each year." – *Samuel King*

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ON THE COVER

Mike Urban, founder and president of the Vintage Hi-Fi Museum, shows off an old Empire turntable manufactured in New York.

Photo by Lynn Woike
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Left: Bob Pienkowski holds a vacuum tube.
Above: This vintage record player converts into an AM radio.

Analog audio

Tiny museum is big on high fidelity music

by Lynn Woike
Editor

It's major. CDs are going out and streaming and vinyl are really the hot ticket now," said Mike Urban, founder and president of the non-profit Vintage Hi-Fi Museum on New Park Avenue.

Vice President Bob Pienkowski said, "There are more new hardware manufacturers making turntables and phono preamps. ... There are more software manufacturers now. Pressing plants are being opened in the U.S."

"Ever since 2008, it's been on the upswing," Urban said, crediting special Record Store Days for renewing interest. The special marketing promotions brought together artists and fans at thousands of independent record stores around the world, with records pressed specifically for that day and sold only at participating shops.

"Some of the existing used vinyl stores would bring the new stuff in and make a big deal out of this day," he said.

"Sony is back into making records again. There's used record stores around, and then there's the new, reissued, repressed new stuff in Barnes and Noble," Urban said.

"It's not back to what it was in its heyday in the '50s and '60s, but it's not gone by any means," Pienkowski said.

On display in the one-room museum are a variety of systems and components from the Golden Age of vacuum tube audio in 1950s and '60s to the solid state transistor designs of the early 1970s.

Those were the glory years for vintage hi-fi, Pienkowski said, that came to an end when everything was black and made in China.

The museum's goals are to preserve and promote this piece of history, while educating a new generation about high-fidelity music, vinyl records and analog audio systems.

Urban credited the younger generation for having better hearing than do older adults, so that they can discern the difference in the quality of the sound.

The two audiophiles attend vintage electronic audio shows to buy, sell and advertise, and pick up pieces with significant history or design to add to the museum's collection.

"Sometimes we have customers who are picking up or giving us repair work," Pienkowski said.

They also find records to sell in the gift shop to help support the museum and pay the rent. Vintage stereos and record players are also for sale, and visitors can get albums cleaned for \$1 each.

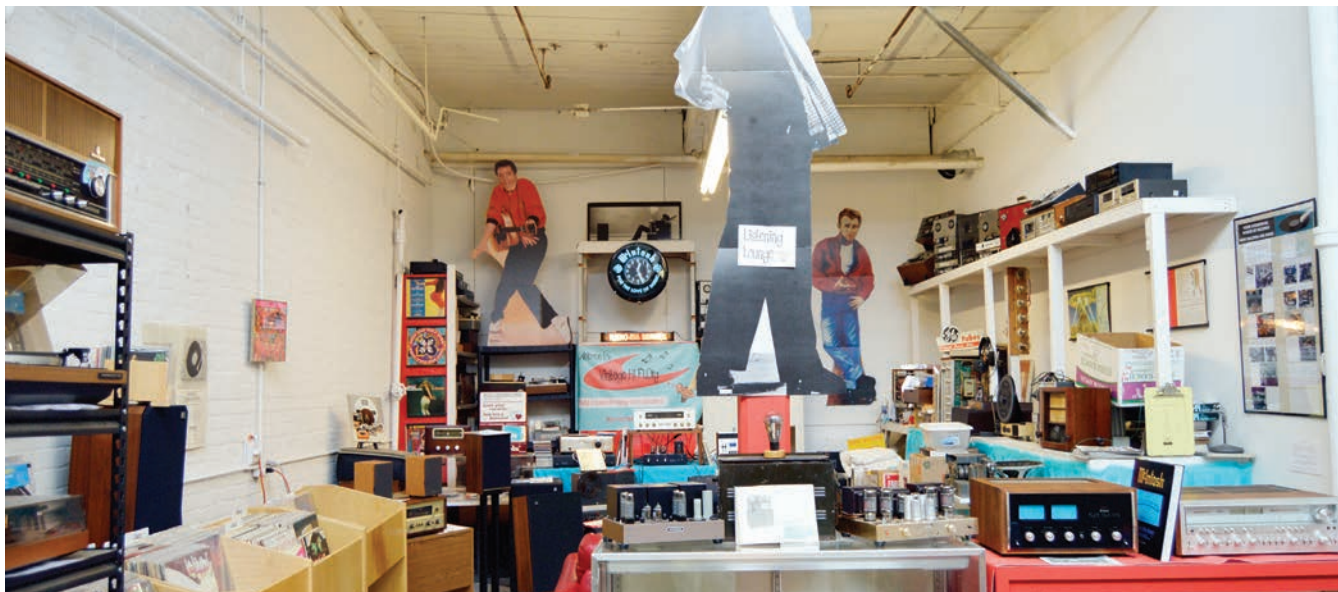
"The market has changed over time," Urban said.

It used to be that equipment came in three price categories: low, medium and high, with the middle-of-the-road components being quite affordable.

"Today, you don't have that. You have the real low-end, throw-it-away-if-it-breaks stuff that they sell at Best Buy and some other places, or the very, very expensive stuff that costs thousands if not tens of thousands of dollars for

"Digital stuff, streaming, iPods and the like are good for portability and mobility, but going home, relaxing, sitting in the chair in front of the stereo system and putting a record on is a whole different experience."

-Mike Urban



In addition to displays of vintage audio high fidelity equipment, the museum has a gift shop and a listening area to demonstrate equipment.

a system. So the middle has disappeared," Urban said.

They aim to fill that void by selling restored vintage components. Stereos and vinyl began disappearing, replaced with CD players and then home theaters. As people bought the new systems, they got rid of their old equipment.

"Well now, people who want to play records again, they have to get that equipment again," he said. "We go to these shows and we find great stuff that was made in the U.S. or Japan ... for a bargain and we know that the quality is there and with a little bit of refurbishment, bring it back to life."

"Digital stuff, streaming, iPods and the like are good for portability and mobility, but going home, relaxing, sitting in the chair in front of the stereo system and putting a record on is a whole different experience," Urban said.

There's a red leather couch in front of a collection of components



Photos by Lynn Wolke



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in the back of the museum for visitors to do just that.

About 20 years ago, Urban, who lives in Windsor, began Urban Radio, repairing old radios when he saw they'd become collectables on eBay.

"All the repair shops were going out of business, so I found a niche and one thing led to another," he said.

It was 1999 when he met Pienkowski.

"He opened up my eyes to other areas of which I really like, like the hi fi arena, and actually that's where we're heading today," Urban said.

"AM radio isn't what it used to be. Shortwave's disappearing. And even FM is kind of mundane. You don't have the album-oriented stuff you had decades ago. So radio is not a theme for the younger generation," he said.

Vinyl records and vacuum tubes are both appreciated by the Millennials, and musicians of all ages are getting back to analog tube amplifiers, Pienkowski said.

"They can learn from us. That was one reason for starting the museum. The other was we have collected all of this fine equipment" and wanted to show it off," Urban said.

"We applied for the nonprofit. We got accepted. This was three years ago and then we found some rental space here and we're going over two years now."

Pienkowski noted that originally, they had two spaces.

"One was dedicated to the museum and the other was dedicated to the sales for helping support the museum, but it turned out that it wasn't financially reasonable, so we consolidated into one space."

That space includes displays, a gift shop and a listening area to demonstrate equipment.

"You end up doing a lot of A-B testing [to determine] which one sounds better," Urban said.

The museum focuses only on vintage audio high fidelity.



Photos by Lynn Wolke



Mike Urban and Bob Pienkowski sit on the couch in the listening area of the Vintage Hi-Fi Museum.

"As I've come to know it, it is the reproduction of music with the least amount of distortion," Urban said.

Pienkowski agreed, adding that while you'll never equal a live performance, vinyl played on a high-quality system is "as close to it as you can get."

There's a difference between analog and digital.

"The ear is basically analog. When you're producing digital music, it's a facsimile of the original. It's a duplication.

"Master tapes are analog. They were created from musicians in a recording studio with live music and you're trying to transfer that to another source. You can transfer analog to analog or you can transfer from analog to digital. But digital is a representation of the original analog," Urban said.

"Digital became popular because it was easier. It doesn't necessarily mean that it's more creative. So some musicians are going back to analog because there are some creative differences. You're not pushing a button to create a sound. You have to generate the

sound originally in an analog form. There's a difference," Urban said, calling digital recording much like Photoshop for music.

"You can't fix things live. When going from tape to tape, you can edit, but you can't fix."

Back in the 1980s, Urban said, "I got sold on CDs. I thought it was going to be the perfect sound and sold all my records. Now I'm buying them back."

He laughed at that.

While some people come in to try to sell items, the museum only accepts donations.

Urban and Pienkowski hope to expand their hours in the future and get back to having more space.

Volunteers are always needed to assist with archiving information, repairing components or promoting the museum.

The museum, located at 485 New Park Avenue, is open Wednesday from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Sunday from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. and by appointment. **WHL**

For more information, visit vintagehifi.org or send an email to vintagehifimuseum@gmail.com.

For the record

Songs today play with a few touches. But in the days of vinyl records, there was a ritual that came with listening to music.

First you selected the album you wanted to hear and reached inside, carefully removing it and its inner liner from the cover. Then, even more carefully so as to touch only the center and an edge, you removed the black disk and carefully placed it on the turntable. You'd apply two or three drops of the cleaning solution and wipe the record with a velvet-like cleaning brush or an anti-static cloth to remove any dust. Powering up the turntable, you'd get it spinning at 33rpm and ever so gently, pick up the needle by the tonearm and place it on the edge of the record, letting it catch the beginning groove, thereby moving it toward the music. If you wished, you could bring the album cover with its awesome art with you to your favorite seat and look at the lyrics or the other special inserts and notes as you listened.

"It was a whole experience," Mike Urban said.



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Down to a science

Center atop Talcott Mountain opened 50 years ago

by Lynn Woike

Editor

Inflation was growing as the Vietnam War continued. “The Sound of Silence,” “We Can Work It Out” and “Monday, Monday” played on the radio. Fashion was dictated by London’s Carnaby Street, the National Guard was being called out to quell race riots across the country, and “Star Trek” and “Batman” debuted on television.

It was 1966 and the United States was in a space race against the USSR to land a man on the moon. The Soviets landed Luna 9 on the moon in February. NASA launched the Gemini 8 space mission in March, put Surveyor 1 on the moon in June and sent up Gemini 10 in July.

Then President Lyndon Johnson had created a program called Projects for Advanced Creativity in Education. Superintendent of Schools Francis Driscoll, Avon science teachers Donald La Salle and George Atamian, and school board member Dr. Alvin Liftig formed the core of a small group that applied for a grant.

Earth science was not a priority in those days, La Salle said. They wanted “to see what the possibilities were for

extracurricular kinds of education in earth sciences. ... There was a possibility of getting some funding for innovative projects. They were looking at creative approaches to science teaching.”

The former Nike missile radar site on Montevideo Road atop Avon Mountain was abandoned by the military and “the mountaintop – with its clear view of the sky and the valleys – was ideal for those kinds of sciences,” he said of the ability to study geography, geology, weather and the cosmos.

“We ran pilot programs in the Valley and met with science teachers and administrators to convince them we could do things together that we couldn’t do individually – both educationally and financially,” La Salle said, admitting it was a challenge to get area school districts to buy into the idea of a regional science center.

Avon applied for a small planning grant of about \$11,400, La Salle said.

“There were 3,000 projects submitted and they funded 10 percent. We were one of the 10 percent, so we did some planning for a year and then we submitted a new proposal for the operational grant and were

“One of our greatest accomplishments was starting a Saturday program that brought students from all over the region to study hands-on science and work with experts in the field. That led us to our academy.”

—Jonathan Craig

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Artist and Astronaut Capt. Alan Bean, the fourth man to walk on the moon, inspires students.

successful at getting that grant for like \$180,000," he said.

At the same time, the district submitted a proposal to the government's Surplus Property Division for the land.

There were a lot of naysayers who thought the idea was crazy because regional cooperation was not being done, La Salle said.

Talcott Mountain Science Center opened October 1, 1967.

Fifty years later, it's proved to be a success, and La Salle still remains involved, serving now on the board of trustees.

"We took a risk and tried something innovative. I'm proud to say we're still going," he said. "I'm proud of the concept of bringing scientists into a science program. Meteorology was taught by a meteorologist and our astronomy class was taught by an astronomer. They come from a different perspective. ... That really inspired the kids. We put together a scientist with the guidance of an educator. We put the two together and that's been a successful model for 50 years."

From the start, it partnered with local schools, offering hands-on, dynamic, authentic science activities in their classrooms and on the mountain.

"They should have fun in school. They should be learning topics that are fun and interacting with topics that are fun. They shouldn't be reading about them in a textbook," Executive Director Jonathan Craig said.

La Salle quoted an old Chinese proverb to explain the center's philosophy: "I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, but I do and I understand."

After the grant ended, "we had to become self-sufficient," he said.

The center chose to become a nonprofit school. La Salle was the executive director and Atamian was the assistant director – both giving up their positions with Avon Public Schools. The advisory committee of representatives from participating towns was replaced with a board of trustees.

Talcott Mountain Science Center continued what it was doing, but now schools purchased the instruction they wanted.

"We continued to sell tailor-made services. There was a smorgasbord of science options. We only asked schools to pay for the services that were specific to them. We would adapt our offerings to meet their needs. If you couldn't come to the mountain, we'd bring the mountain to you," La Salle said.

He credits that model with the center's success, noting many other projects failed after their grants ended because they couldn't support themselves.

Several summer programs attracted exceptional students from all over the country and staff from overseas.

"We came along parallel to the space program. As the space program grew and matured, we also did. And we were very much a big part of that," said La Salle who was invited to the Apollo 10 and two shuttle launches.

"We always felt a very good kinship with the NASA Space Program," he said. "The NASA Space Program had a lot of spin-off into the schools. They used to have a mobile van, the Space Mobile, that went out to schools and we coordinated the one for Connecticut."

Craig said, "We used to have a lunar landing program that simulated the lunar landing just as it

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Making their own weather instruments enhances the lesson.

was done in the cockpit of the lunar lander. We used the same power they did. We crashed a few times.”

“It was one of their most popular programs,” La Salle said, adding that today, the simulation would be done in 3D.

“The space program contributed a lot to what we do,” he said.

It wasn’t just robots and computers, it was also time and talent. Fourteen astronauts came to the Talcott Mountain Science Center, including Alan Bean, the fourth person to walk on the moon; Kathy Sullivan, the first American woman to walk in space; and Mae Jemison, the first African American woman to travel in space. Bean became a supporter, frequent visitor and a featured speaker numerous times. The center’s planetarium is named after him.

“As technology developed, we were able to make good use of it and talked to people through satellite communication around the country or around the world,” La Salle said. “We were leaders in the program for gifted kids in science.”

The center’s first computer was a PDP-11 that stood more than six feet tall and had 4 kilobytes of memory, said Craig, noting that today’s phones have 64 gigabytes.

“It was a timeshare computer, so local businesses used it with terminals that they’d call in on and there were terminals up here that were wired to it. So our first completely new building in 1978 was dedicated to using a timeshare computer. Now we have three computer labs and computers in every classroom,” he said.

“One of our greatest accomplishments,” Craig said, “was starting a Saturday program that brought students from all over the region to

study hands-on science and work with experts in the field. That led us to our academy.”

Students were not just gifted on Saturdays; they needed a full-time program, he said.

After two years of planning, the Talcott Mountain Academy of Science, Mathematics and Technology opened in 1983 for grades 4-7.

“It turned out there was a lot of interest,” La Salle said.

The academy has since expanded to K-8 and four years ago, celebrated its 30th anniversary. Small class sizes mean individualized instruction. This year there are about 65 students. Top enrollment was 78. A number of students have gone through the entire program.

“Graduates have gone on to make their mark in medicine, astronomy, earth sciences,” La Salle said.

“They are now capable of being future Shoulders of Giants,” Craig said, referring to a speakers program that La Salle began in the early 1980s. Two or more times a year, notable speakers have visited. In addition to the 14 astronauts, they have included British primatologist Jane Goodall, Dr. Henry Lee, “Shark Lady” Eugenie Clark, marine biologist and explorer Sylvia Earl, three Nobel Laureates and hundreds of others. The latest was Dr. Priya Natarajan, an astrophysicist from Yale University.

The campus’ 20 acres atop the mountain features a variety of microhabitats and several buildings. There are more than a dozen telescopes – including an automated 16-inch Meade – and three observatories.

“Our planetarium is the largest teaching planetarium in the state,” Craig said.

The Alan L. Bean Hypospherium multi-media tilted-dome planetarium

seats 98. Built in 1990, it provides views of the night sky, large screen viewing and special effects.

The Steve Perlman Hypermedia Library and Conference Center, dedicated to an alumnus and West Hartford native in 1998, provides research space and content creation on iMac computers and iPads, and houses the robotics labs. Perlman, founder of WebTV, is the center’s biggest benefactor. It was Perlman who introduced the science center to 3D printers in 2000, Craig said.

The cornerstone of the distance-learning program through the National Science Foundation and the U.S. Department of Education is the Arnold L. Chase Student Communications and Technology Center, dedicated in 1997.

A weather lab allows students to simulate snowflakes, lightning, tornadoes and record live weather from instrumentation and cameras atop the ridge.

A scale model of the solar system begins with the sun represented by the 18-foot-diameter radar dome, and with the planets arranged from Mercury on the rooftop of the Student Technology Center to Pluto 15 miles away in Bristol, on top of Otis Elevator Tower.

In October, the new astronomical observatory was dedicated to Brian Lindsay, an Avon resident, West Hartford businessman and an amateur astronomer.

“He bought some very expensive astronomical equipment and was using it in his backyard in Avon for a number of years. His widow left us the equipment and the Lindsay Foundation, the family foundation, gave the money to build this new observatory. And it’s a rather unique observatory. It’s got a sliding roof on it and it houses a 12-inch Meade telescope and a 10-inch Meade telescope given to us by Dr. Walter Hampton. The two telescopes together are worth close to \$40,000, and the observatory was another \$15,000 to build so it’s one of the finest facilities in the state,” Craig said.

“We’ve opened our astronomy programs to the public in the past couple of years and we’ve had a lot of people come up for an evening observing. The new observatory offered more opportunities to see more objects including three different nebula, the Andromeda Galaxy and Saturn’s rings.

“We had about 150 people here for the eclipse. We had our solar

scopes out and we gave everybody solar glasses that we’d gotten from NASA. We were able to accommodate everybody to views of the sun through projecting off of solar filters,” he said.

Solar supplements some of the center’s energy needs. Laboratories are equipped with the latest technology.

“We teach with the very things we are teaching about,” Craig said of computers, 3D printers, robots and more.

“We’re in all kinds of robotic programs. We had a group from China here this summer that was learning robotics. There were groups of teachers who came here from South Korea and were learning our methods for teaching gifted. So we’re known not just locally, but worldly.”

Science and technology are integrated into all aspects of the curriculum that also includes engineering, mathematics and art. Courses are offered in astronomy, biology, environmental science, chronobiology, energy, the environment, geology, meteorology, computers and robotics.

“There are a lot of neat new things. Technology is forever changing and we’re trying to keep up with it. It’s a challenge,” Craig said.

That includes a fleet of drones, some which are flown inside.

“The students are using a program called Aurasma that employs augmented reality. You can take your cellphone and download a program and our students would paint a picture and in that picture would be an identifying mark that the phone could pick up on and it would animate the picture. It would actually bring things to life. We did it for our anniversary where we had all of our speakers and we animated each of the individual photos of the speaker on a poster so that you could hear them talking and see them talking on your phone, just by pointing it at them,” he explained.

“We’re currently embarking on a campaign to enhance our facilities,” Craig said. “We’ll be working on a project for the planetarium and new facilities to reach out into the community further using distance learning.”

The anniversary will be observed all year with a variety of events highlighting some of what’s being done at the center and with a more formal celebration in the spring. **WHL**

Heating up the savings

For 25 years Citizens Oil Co-op has been saving members money

by Alicia B. Smith
Associate Editor

Some people wear their heart on their sleeves, others on their license plate. Mark Hutson and his wife, Rosie Stanko, drive around in their green mini van with the inquiry on their plate – Got Oil.

For 25 years the couple has overseen the Citizen's Oil Co-op, operating the business out of their West Hartford home. The goal is simple: save their members money.

Hutson described the co-op as being like a BJ's Wholesale Club, "We are a buying club for your energy."

In other words, Stanko said, "you pay a membership."

"Then you get a discount," Hutson finished.

The couple both worked at the Citizens Action Group in Hartford, which operated the oil co-op. The group eventually decided to drop the oil portion of its program and Hutson asked the board if he could take over the oil program and run it on his own. They agreed.

"No one was really interested in oil," Stanko said. "It wasn't sexy."

Hutson was interested, in part, because oil co-ops were profitable in other states.

Mark Hutson and his wife Rosie Stanko have been operating the Citizen's Oil Co-op, offering savings to members for their heating fuel for 25 years.



Photo by Alicia B. Smith

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“We are also an advocacy agency for our members. We go to bat for them.”

—Rosie Stanko

Initially the co-op had 300 members and the couple ran it out of an office in their basement. They opted to open it to other businesses and nonprofits.

Through the years they have experienced the highs and lows of oil prices. During the 2000 low, the co-op had about 500 members. Stanko reached out to news media outlets, which ran a story on the co-op, and the next day the phone was ringing off the hook.

Around the same time, Hutson was interviewed for a story in a local daily paper. The day after the article ran, he said the phones went crazy.

“We have something here people can take advantage of,” Hutson said.

As membership grew, the couple expanded to offering the co-op to residents throughout the state not



A reminder of their business is on the license plate belonging to the owners of the Citizen's Oil Co-op.

just in Greater Hartford. They also added propane, insurance, energy audits and solar.

“Our biggest challenge is no one knows we exist,” Stanko said.

Citizen's Oil Co-op is not an oil company; rather Hutson described their work as being a middleman. Members join and the co-op finds them the best oil company in terms of price and service with which to do business.

“We are also an advocacy agency for our members,” Stanko said. “We go to bat for them. We have an inside with the companies. We've been able to mediate repairs. We can usually bridge something to get the oil company to knock \$100 off the bill. There is no one else out there

that really does that.”

“It helps the oil company, too; they don't want to lose a customer,” she continued.

In 2014 the co-op opted to do a reverse auction in which the companies they work with would bid to provide oil; that caused providers to lower their prices to get the most customers.

“They bid each other down,” Stanko said.

The co-op recently expanded to offer membership to customers in Rhode Island.

Looking back through the past 25 years, Hutson said they did not see the sense in letting the oil co-op end.

“There is a lot of passion on Mark's part to save consumers money,” Stanko said.

Today the co-op has 6,000 members across all their offerings and the business has continued to operate out of the owners' home.

One of the things the couple points to that has contributed to their success is allowing members to stay with the same oil company from one heating season to the next.

“People don't like change,” Hutson said.

In addition, the co-op works with oil companies throughout the state, most of which have been in business for 40 or more years, offer members the same billing plans and provide 24-hour emergency service as well as automatic delivery.

Co-op members pay a one-time \$10 fee to join and then pay annual dues of \$30 or \$20 for seniors. Members that refer two new members to the co-op are eligible for additional savings. The co-op also enables members to register an organization and the co-op will donate the application fee to that organization.

“It's really built on the purchasing power. Together we can negotiate a price better than you can buy yourself,” Stanko said. **WHL**

For more information visit oilco-op.com or call 860-561-6011.

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33 years of service

Assistant Fire Chief Richard Winn retires his turnout gear

by Alicia B. Smith

If Richard Winn had not become a firefighter, he speculated he would have spent his career sitting at a desk working as an accountant. Instead he spent his career fighting fires, rescuing victims at accident scenes and ... sitting at a desk, most recently as assistant fire chief with the West Hartford Fire Department.

This all changed on Halloween when Winn put

away his turnout gear for good, retiring after 33 years with the department.

His career in fire service began in 1977 when he volunteered with his hometown department in Barkhamsted. Winn accompanied a friend who wanted to look into volunteering with the department. His friend went off to college and it was Winn who stuck around, trained and served in the department as a firefighter.



Celebrating 50 Years of Service 1967-2017



Photo by Alicia B. Smith

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In those days, modern air packs were just coming online and he and his fellow department members rode outside of the trucks on the way to a scene.

Winn had worked his way up to fire chief with the volunteer department when he interviewed for a job in West Hartford. He was told he would be hired as a firefighter and would likely be responsible for helping with some menial tasks – a far cry from his role as chief.

"If I can do it as a volunteer, I can do it and get paid," Winn said he told those interviewing him about cleaning the station toilets.

Winn joined the WHFD in 1984 as a firefighter and after four years became an apparatus operator. That job was short lived as he was soon promoted to lieutenant, a position he had for many years before taking on the job as training captain. After roughly 10 years he was promoted again, this time to battalion chief, which also had him working on administrative tasks. For the past four years he has

served as assistant chief.

"I've probably almost held every position in the department, but not chief," Winn said, adding that he has at one time or another served in each of the department's five stations.

Chief Gary Allyn agreed Winn has held just about every promotable position in the department, even occasionally serving as acting chief in his absence. Additionally,

"He could fit into any situation. He was very accommodating and did the job that needed to be done. There never was a time when he said, 'That's not in my job description.'"

–Chief Gary Allyn

Allyn said Winn was the longest serving member in the department. He joked that some of the newest members were not even born when Winn joined the department.

"He could fit into any situation," Allyn said. "He was very accommodating and did the job that needed to be done. There never was a time when he said, 'That's not in my job description.'"

Winn's retiring will leave a huge

void in the department, the chief said, not only in terms of the job he does as assistant chief, but he leaves with a breadth of knowledge about the department and decades of experience.

"This was his life's calling," Allyn said.

The chief has plans to keep Winn in the loop until someone else is hired as assistant chief. Allyn said there are some projects that Winn was working on and he has asked him to come in at least one day a week to wrap up those projects.

In addition, Allyn said, Winn is active in fire service outside of West Hartford. He still serves his first department in the role of president with the Barkhamsted Volunteer Fire Department and oversees the Litchfield County Regional Fire Training School. He also serves on the Board of Finance in his hometown.

"I wish I had more employees like him," Allyn said. "He has seen this department grow and he's been part of that. It's been a journey."

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Town Manager Matt Hart is relatively new to town, however he was quick to learn how valuable Winn has been to the community.

"He seems to be a pretty neat guy. I think he's very public service orientated. I just commend him for his service to the region and his home town in addition to his West Hartford service," Hart said.

On October 31, a reception was held by the town to recognize Winn for his service and wish him well in his retirement. Mayor Shari Cantor declared it Richard T. Winn Day.

Retirement is among many changes Winn is experiencing. Another came just two years ago when he got married for the first time, becoming a stepfather to four children, two dogs and four grandchildren.

"It was one I was happy to make," Winn said of this change in his life.

He said he knows he will miss the people he has worked with in retirement, from those in the fire and police departments along with those at town hall. He said he will not miss waking up at all hours of the night when an app on his phone rings to update him on all fire calls.

Through the years Winn has witnessed a change in how fire service is done. The biggest has been with technology. The most important change has been the air packs that firefighters use, which improved to the point where Winn said they enable firefighters to go further into buildings during a call than before. The turnout gear, or the protective suits firefighters wear, have improved, too. It remains heavy, but Winn said, it offers more protection.

The biggest change he has seen comes from within the department itself, with the WHFD adding paramedic services.

Another change he has

noticed is the attitude brought in by younger members of the department. Winn said millennials are more interested in striking a work-life balance and are not looking for overtime the way firefighters did when he was first hired.

"It's an adjustment we all have to make," Winn said. "They were brought up with these," he said, picking up his cell phone. "They want information now."

"We are busier than we ever have been," Winn said.

Among the memorable events he responded to throughout his expansive career are the casualty of a bridge inspector when his truck toppled over on the I-84 ramp and rescuing a worker from a

trestle bridge during the construction of the CTfastrack busway.

"The fires all seemed routine to me," he said. "I've always

had a knack to focus on the job and do what I need to do."

He is so focused that once at an accident scene he was talking to the victim and it was not until well after the event that he realized that he knew the person involved.

It is not uncommon for families to get involved in the field. Winn was the first in his family to work as a firefighter and now his brother is one, and his niece works as firefighter and paramedic with the WHFD.

For those interested in pursuing a career in the field, Winn said the training is key, which includes training to be a Firefighter 1 and Firefighter 2 as well as paramedic training.

"I've been honored to serve the citizens of West Hartford and others," Winn said. "It's bittersweet," he added about leaving, "but I know at some point I had to make that decision." **WHL**

**"This was his
life's calling."**

—Chief Gary Allyn

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Metro Bis Restaurant owner Chris Prosperi, Samuel King of Blue Earth Compost and Brian Pagani from Quantum Biopower participate in a discussion about "Landfill Alternatives for Food Waste."

Photo by Laurel Hoskins

Green Forum

Experts address the problem with food waste

by Lynn Woike
Editor

"One third or more of the food we produce is never eaten." That sentence by John Mandryk, chief sustainability officer at United Technologies Corporation and co-author of "Food Foolish," kicked off the first of three lectures this fall focusing on food waste.

Volunteers with University of Connecticut Extension based in West Hartford collaborated with Auerfarm in Bloomfield this fall to create The Green Forum @ Auerfarm educational series. The forums took place in September, October and November, providing West Hartford and Bloomfield residents the chance to hear from experts about the growing global food waste crisis, and recognizing and developing local opportunities to reduce, transform and oth-

erwise divert it from landfills.

Describing the enormity of the growing crisis, Mandryk said that 40 percent of the food that's grown is never eaten. Each year Americans throw away 1.3 billion metric tons of food – enough to feed 4 billion people while saving enough carbon emissions to remove every car off of every road every year and providing enough

food each year and it's not just food we are throwing away – it's also the water, energy, hard work and natural resources used to grow the food."

Susannah Castle in West Hartford founded the company in 2013; she sold the company when her husband took a job on the West Coast. Now partners Alex Williams and King have

day from businesses, schools, senior living facilities and events primarily in the Hartford, Middletown and New Haven areas.

Residents do the best job of keeping organic material contaminate free, he said.

Everything is taken to Quantum Biopower in Southington, New England's only 100 percent food waste anaerobic digester. Blue Earth then picks up the finished compost from Quantum and delivers it to back to clients to use in their gardens.

King spoke about the changing landscape, noting that Connecticut adopted food recycling mandates and some business clients are finding it financially beneficial to separate out their food waste.

"In a small way, we're evidence of the fact that the food waste recycling can be a

"Food is the number one material sent to landfills. We throw out 40 percent of our food each year."

–Samuel King

water to meet all of Africa's need.

"Food is the number one material sent to landfills," said Samuel King from Blue Earth Compost in West Hartford, speaking at the second lecture. "We throw out 40 percent of our

grown and expanded the business. What began with about 20 residential customers now picks up food scraps from more than 150 residential customers in addition to a commercial service that collects four to five tons a

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profitable endeavor," he said.

Also on the panel for the second forum, "Landfill Alternatives for Food Waste," was Brian Paganini from Quantum Biopower in Southington and Chris Prosperi, owner of Metro Bis Restaurant in Simsbury.

November's meeting, which was scheduled to occur after the paper went to press, had a panel addressing "Impacts of Food Waste Strategies on Hunger." Speakers included Lucy Nolan, former director of End Hunger! CT, Karen Franczyk, Green Mission coordinator for Whole Foods; Jason Jakubowski, president and CEO of Foodshare; and West Hartford Public Works director John Phillips.

Whole Foods' donation program works with 16 local organizations in connection with its two West Hartford stores plus the one in Glastonbury, Franczyk said. If you add up all three stores, about three tons of food gets donated each week. Of that, slightly more than half of that is perishable and most of that is from the bakery and produce. There's also a fair amount of dairy and cheese, she said.

At the end of the day, unsold sandwiches are donated. Other items such as cut fruit are pulled the day before they expire and are donated, along with produce that does not meet the stores' high standards.

After reviewing its practices, Whole Foods was able to double its donations when it expanded the program in February 2014 – all of which is in keeping with the corporation's core values of helping the community and the environment.

To reduce waste, efforts are made to not bring in too much product, as well as to not over-produce prepared foods, Franczyk said, "but there's always extra so then we try to donate where we can. Anything that's left after that, or the



More food is being donated, helping the community and the environment.

Courtesy photo

scraps from cooking, etc. will all go to the anaerobic digester in Southington."

Quantum Biopower is one of three partners in a four-month experiment in West Hartford, Phillips said. The others are Covanta Energy that provided the bins, and Paines Inc. that currently collects separated food waste from all West Hartford Public School kitchens and roughly half of their cafeterias. The 130 volunteer households participating are within interior streets of the block bordered by Sedgwick Road, Fern Street, Mountain Road and North Main Street.

"The trial is an experiment, not a pilot program, because it will not lead to a full-time program. A lot more has to be studied," Phillips said, so that there can be an understanding of food waste coming from a residential household. How many would participate, the logistics of collecting it inside the house, how families manage their practices, how it gets from the kitchen to the curb, how it is collected, if it's free of contaminants, and what residential users think about it are all pieces of information necessary to plan a town-wide program.

"Is it doable?" "Is it something we can expect the general population to do as a mandated program or are we over-reaching?" are questions he hopes will be answered.

"We hope to understand the challenges and benefits of a food separation service with real experiences and educated

assumptions. We understand this is a transformational change to the way we handle waste materials now, however garbage is a real issue for municipalities, as we are in the midst of a waste disposal crisis in this state. The more we know the better decisions we can make for the future of services the town can offer. We throw away too much material that has a higher and better value than in a traditional incinerator or landfill system. Food is an important fuel for not only our bodies, but a fuel that can be used to make clean renewable energy with a typically lower disposal cost than traditional disposal fees," Phillips said.

"Food waste is a significant piece of the waste stream. According to DEEP, 30 percent of Connecticut's waste stream is organic. Our waste in Connecticut either goes to incineration or landfill," he said, adding, "It doesn't belong there."

"We're in our schools. We're source separating all food in school kitchens and the students are doing it in eight cafeterias. We hope to add two more schools this year ... and all in the next two to three years," Phillips said. "We took out almost 12 tons of waste out of the school system last year."

That was with just half the schools participating.

"Students have responded well," he said, and that's important because "there will be a different world of waste management in 2030."

“We’re running out of places to throw garbage. ... We need to change our behaviors.”

–John Phillips

College campuses are already doing it. So are some McDonald’s out West. Soon we’ll be seeing it happening on the East Coast, Phillips said.

While there is a fee to bring organic material to Quantum, it’s cheaper than having it incinerated or accepted at a landfill, so there are some fiscal benefits along with environmental benefits.

“I’m motivated because it makes sense more than anything else,” he said, explaining that the biological process breaks down food waste into compost and combustible methane gas that is a clean fuel source.

Currently, it costs about \$66 a ton to bring trash to be incinerated. In the next 10 years, he expects it to cost more than \$100.

“That’s when you’ll start seeing

the fiscal benefits,” he said.

Four more anaerobic digester plants are in the design phase or permitting process with expectations they could be open in Connecticut by 2020.

“We’re running out of places to throw garbage. ... We need to change our behaviors,” Phillips said.

Foodshare President and CEO Jason Jakubowski said he planned to talk about some of the region’s hunger statistics at the November meeting.

“In Hartford and Tolland counties there are more than 127,000 people who are what we call food insecure. That is one out of every eight individuals and one out of every six children. Here at Foodshare, we are extremely

grateful to the food industry in Connecticut for donating the majority of our stock. Were it not for the food that otherwise would be discarded by these companies, we could not do what we do year round,” Jakubowski said.

Among those supporting this year’s Green Forum @ Auerfarm were Blue Plate Kitchen, Cricket Press, Laurel Graphic Design and Trader Joe’s – all of West Hartford.

Jenny Riggs, president of

Each Whole Foods store donates an average of one ton of food per week.



Courtesy photo

UConn’s Hartford Cooperative Extension Council, is pleased with the interest and participation in the Green Forums.

“These presentations and discussions have really opened my eyes to the scale of the food waste problem and all the interconnected environmental and social issues it affects. If we can reduce food waste, we can have a broad positive impact on our environment and society,” she said. **WHL**



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News Roundup

Democrats retain supermajority on Town Council

West Hartford Democrats retained their 6-3 supermajority on the Town Council in the Nov. 7 election.

Democratic leaders lauded the outcome as a victory for democratic policies and values, they also called it a victory for women as three female members were elected to the Board of Education and the top two vote getters on the Town Council — Mayor Shari Cantor and Beth Kerrigan — were women.

Cantor, the town's fifth female mayor who was appointed during the last term when Scott Slifka stepped down, was elected with 8,996 votes.

"I just want to say what an honor it is to serve with such an incredibly committed, great group of people. West Hartford is so remarkable because of the past leadership we've had. ... We finished strong. Top six again," she said.

Also elected on the Democratic side were council newcomer Liam Sweeney; Dallas Dodge, who was appointed to fill a vacancy; Ben Wenograd, who was re-elected for a second term; and Deputy Mayor Leon Davidoff who was re-elected for a sixth term.

West Hartford Republicans had hoped this was the year when they could grab a fourth seat.

Veteran Denise Berard Hall decided not to seek another term.

Her position as minority leader now belongs to Chris Barnes, the longest-serving Republican, who received the most votes among the

six candidates from his party.

Barnes will be serving his third term. Incumbent Chris Williams, serving his second term, and political newcomer Mary Fay will join him.

GOP candidates Ryan Langdon and Julie Krug fell short but pledged to remain involved in politics and said they would consider running again in 2019.

Many Republicans who gathered for the evening at the Beachland Tavern in Elmwood thought that the state budget crisis and rising taxes would result in a different outcome this time around. But it was not to be.

Voter turnout of approximately 30 percent was part of the problem, Republicans said. Another factor is the overwhelming 3:1 voter registration advantage held by the Democrats.

Republican Town Committee Chairman Dennis Swanton expressed his frustration, but chose to take a positive approach to the results.

"There is an opportunity here.

We just have to work harder to change hearts and minds," he said. "I'm disappointed. I think our candidates did a great job."

Barnes added that the town's fiscal situation is unsustainable and it can expect to receive reduced state aid in the future. Republicans for years have criticized what they see as a dangerously underfunded town employee pension plan.

"Hopefully, my Democrat colleagues will have the political will to take a hard look at spending," Barnes said.

Majority of state aid restored under bipartisan budget

Under the newly passed state budget, West Hartford will receive a total aid package of just over \$24 million in the current fiscal year.

For months the state has operated under Gov. Dannel Malloy's executive order until Thursday, Oct. 26 when a bipartisan budget was passed. The Senate vote was 33-3 in favor of the budget and the House vote was 126-23. It was signed into law by the governor Tuesday, Oct. 31.

The overall aid package for West Hartford in FY 2018 is a reduction of \$1.575 million (6 percent) from what the town received in FY 2017, but the reduction is far less devastating than budget plans proposed over the past six months.

In FY 2017, West Hartford's total aid package was \$25,634,623, of which \$21,096,924 was Education Cost Sharing. The total aid package for FY 2018 will be \$24,060,063, of which \$19,913,284 is ECS.

In the town's adopted FY 2018 budget, a total of \$27,586,949 in state aid formula grants was assumed, but the town included a built-in \$7 million contingency to offset any shortfall from the year prior, leaving a general fund impact of \$20.5 million. With the addition of other state funding of Adult Education and LoCIP, total state aid was assumed at \$20,659,091. The town will see an actual impact to the general fund of \$26,340,478 under the approved budget, based on formula grants, other state aid and the ability to issue supplemental car taxes at 37 mills, should the Town Council decide to do so. This reflects a total increase in revenue of \$5,681,387, or 28 percent from the town's adopted budget assumption of total state aid.

MDC consumer advocate expected to be in place by first of the year

The process is underway to bring an independent consumer advocate to the Metropolitan District Commission.

Legislation was passed last spring to amend the MDC charter to establish an independent consumer advocate and require the MDC to pay for the role, which will be appointed by Connecticut's consumer counsel.

The legislation was introduced by state Sen. Beth Bye and state Rep. Derek Slap of West Hartford, and state Rep. David Baram of Bloomfield, two municipalities that saw a significant amount of backlash last year when the MDC announced a plan to offer water to a potential Niagara Bottling plant in Bloomfield at a reduced rate. During a hearing on the legislation, West Hartford resident Patricia O'Connor, a member of the group Save Our Water, testified that the advocate would not only keep residents informed, it would restore transparency and repair broken trust between the member towns and the MDC.

According to the job posting for the role, the advocate will represent consumer interests including rates, water quality, water supply and wastewater service quality. The person will be paid not more than \$70,000 in year one and \$50,000 each year after unless greater need is demonstrated. They will have access to MDC records and all other MDC information except for employment records and other internal documents deemed not relevant.

Consumer counsel Elin Katz, a West Hartford resident, said applications, which were due in October, will be reviewed and interviews set in anticipation of having the person in place Jan. 1, 2018. **WHL**

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On the stage and off

Dimensional Dance makes connections with history and social justice

by **Alicia B. Smith**
Associate Editor

Ruth Lewis made a decision as a child. She wanted to dance.

Inspired by a performance she had seen of “Sleeping Beauty” broadcast on PBS, she told her parents, “I want to do that.”

And she did.

She trained with the The Cleveland Ballet and joined the Hartford Ballet. Throughout her professional career she has also danced with the Berkshire Ballet and the American Repertory

Ballet, finishing her career as a principal dancer there.

Lewis was born in Jakarta, grew up in Harvard, Massachusetts and spent four years in Bermuda, where she worked as the ballet master for the National Ballet of Bermuda.

About 20 years ago she returned to the United States, settling in Avon.

She was not ready to give up her career in dance entirely and soon turned to choreography. She taught at the Ballet Theatre Company, serving as ballet master there, and went

on to choreograph pieces for other dance companies. She took up teaching dance, including classes at Miss Porter’s School in Farmington.

In 2011 she founded her own dance company, Dimensional Dance, based in West Hartford.

Around the same time Lewis became a teaching artist, offering workshops in schools where she uses dance to teach other academic topics – all of which is based on Howard Gardner’s multiple intelligence theory.

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Dancers of all ages are part of the company at Dimensional Dance.



Courtesy Photos

"People learn in different ways," she said, explaining Gardner's theory.

Among the learning styles are musical, interpersonal, logical, linguistic and visual.

Most of her teaching work is done in HOT schools, or Higher Order Thinking schools, which require a teaching artist to work with their students.

Choreography strategies are used to get elementary school students to experience the process for kinesthetically understanding science curriculum topics such as sound; the water cycle, body systems and the moon.

Lewis also works with Hartford Performs in a teaching capacity offering a program with a social justice element. She calls this piece "We Rise," having been inspired by Maya Angelou's poem, "Still I Rise."

"I teach kids how to do choreography; there are specific choreography standards," Lewis said, referring to the National Core Arts Standards, which covers theater, music, art, dance and visual arts. In this program she helps students read Angelou's poem and put it into context.

"We analyze it and bring it to life through movement," Lewis said. "The art form is getting them to feel comfortable."

Students get up and

moving, in part, by forming their bodies into different shapes. They then work together to choreograph a piece.

Some students learn better if they are allowed to move and not be stuck at a desk all day, she said.

"That movement helps them learn. It helps them retain the information."

Lewis also incorporates a discussion on the importance of students completing their

Romantic ballet, classical ballet, modern, neoclassical ballet, jazz, hip hop and contemporary dance.

The program was created to represent famous dances and choreographers, including bits from ballets such as "Giselle," "Swan Lake, as well as choreography made famous by the likes of Alvin Ailey, Paul Taylor, George Ballanchine, Martha Graham, Isadora Duncan and others.

"If you are a dancer you would notice all these things, all the subtle differences," Lewis said.

The differences were shown not only in the choreography but also in the costumes the dancers wore: long tutus for the Romantic ballet dancers, shorter ones for the classical ballet portion, with minimal costumes for the neoclassical and more free flowing clothing for the modern dance.

While the history of dance was used as inspiration for a recent performance, in the past the dance studio has used the works of sculptor Antoine-Louis Bayre, and artists Andrew Wyeth, Barbara Grossman, and Giorgio Morandi. **WHL**

For more information on Dimensional Dance visit dimensionaldance.com.

**"That movement helps them learn.
It helps them retain the information."**

– Ruth Lewis

education with the hope that she can help them find the things they are passionate about, learn to be patient and to be kind to themselves.

"If I can get them to think just a little bit, than I am successful," Lewis said.

Although some students may be reluctant at first to get out of their seats and move, Lewis said she usually wins them over and typically has 100 percent participation.

Outside of the classroom, Lewis has been busy recently as her dance company was preparing for an upcoming performance, "A Brief History of Western Dance," performed in early November.

"We show[ed] the different elements of dance," she said. There were components of

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LIFE

in the kitchen with chef KC Ward

by Alicia B. Smith
Associate Editor



Photo by Alicia B. Smith

KC Ward walked up the flight of stairs into the restaurant and a few minutes later he hopped in the line in the kitchen, sautéing, plating and chopping chives as if he owned the place.

He does.

Flora is the latest culinary adventure from Ward, who in 2015 opened Rooster Company in neighboring Newington.

While his first restaurant primarily served carnivorous customers, now he is offering a healthy alternative at his new place.

"When I first saw the space [I thought] West Hartford Center does not need more of the same," Ward said. "The center already had so many great options."

To stand out, Ward and his wife, Jaime, developed a concept focused on vegan foods, offering a healthy option, with a touch of "viable fauna" on the menu for those who need their protein, such as crispy calamari, albacore tuna, hay-smoked mussels, and beef and beet tartare.

"I'm going with what I feel good about serving," Ward said. "Product with integrity is always something that has been important to me."

The rest of the menu is chock full of vegetable and alternative proteins such as tempeh and healthy substitutes for those looking for hearty comfort food like the Mac-and-no-cheese made with cauliflower puree and spaghetti with no-meat balls. There is also a selection of small plates, salads and soups.

The restaurant also boasts a variety of juices concocted at the restaurant's bar, which also serves up a daily cleanse option, smoothies, non-dairy beverages, and infused waters and elixirs for a variety of

ailments including recovery, detox, colds, aging and hangovers. The beverage menu also includes an organic wine list and cocktails made with all-natural spirits.

"It's a little bit of a different vibe," Ward said.

"I've been focused on trying to find organic products and local whenever available. It's been a great experience for me as a chef. I can work with this great new portfolio. It's been an enriching challenge."

For many years, Ward was a vegetarian and when he began working in restaurants, he was advised that he would need to taste everything he was preparing if he intended to become a chef.

"I did let go and became an omnivore," he said.

His wife, however, maintains healthy eating habits and asks him to make her plant-based plates when he is at home.

"I really think this is something that will resonate with people, foodies or those who are lactose intolerant, or if you are looking for a healthy lunch or going out with a couple who isn't vegan."

While he respected the view of some hard-core vegans who pushed him to opt for an all-vegan menu, Ward said his goal was to make healthy food more accessible.

This way the menu offers something for every diner. Even those who enjoy meat may find they really like the meatless chili or the tempeh.

The restaurant is located in the second floor at 45 Raymond Road, the site of the American Legion Post 96. The post was looking to find a tenant for its space that would enable them to continue to host their monthly meetings there and give them a physical address for their mail to be delivered – two means of maintaining their viability as a post. Once a month Ward will open up the

banquet room for post meetings and hopes to also use the space for private parties.

Ward grew up in West Hartford, attending Charter Oak, Duffy and Sedgwick schools and graduating from Conard High. He went to college for one semester in Montana and transferred to Eastern Connecticut State University. An accident prevented him from attending school during that second semester of his freshman year. While recovering he became hooked watching chef Mario Batali on television. His parents finally told him when he was well enough, he needed to find a job. He began working in a pizza place.

It was then he knew he had found his calling. He decided to not return to college and instead learn everything he could about cooking and operating a restaurant.

He eventually landed at job at Billy Grant's Restaurant Bricco, the place where he would meet his wife, who is also a West Hartford native.

"I've always known I wanted to do something with my hands," Ward

said. He had thought that might turn into a career as a furniture maker. Instead he ended up in the kitchen.

"Billy taught me a love for cooking and a passion for working with and serving people," Ward said of Grant.

Ward went on to be one of the co-founders of the Plan B restaurant,

"I've been focused on trying to find organic products and local whenever available. I can work with this great new portfolio. It's been an enriching challenge."

—Chef KC Ward

Ward, working as chef and partner at the Park Road location.

Eventually Ward decided he wanted to expand beyond cooking burgers and went to work at Trumbull Kitchen in Hartford before going to Bricco.

When he learned that a space was available in Newington, Ward decided he was ready to break out on his own. Partnering with friends

John Martin and Robert Bouvier, Rooster Company opened in Newington.

Ward spent the summer renovating the Flora space. He kept the wood paneling and his favorite element – a fireplace – and took down a wall and added a half wall between the dining room and the restrooms. He added gold light fixtures and

prep area where salads are made has a living wall as a backdrop. Lining the wall are shelves of herbs that grow under lights and can be cut as needed to add flavor to the dishes coming out of the kitchen.

Among the herbs growing here is tatsoi, a lemony flavored green. It's something Ward has always bought before and found it flavorful but without much vitality and brightness one seeks from fresh greens. Growing it himself, on the wall, keeps it fresh.

The excitement for his new restaurant, Ward said, is something that keeps building. He referred to a book he read in which the author describes opening a bottle of wine and realizing the flavor is there and it's good, but if he had been given another six months to age, it will be great.

For Ward, the restaurant is almost like having a child, – you know if you wait the baby is going to be talking and walking, bringing a whole new perspective to your life.

"You can envision all the things it's going to become," Ward said. "This is it." **WHL**



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Photos by Alicia B. Smith



TOP: The living wall of herbs is wonderful for adding fresh flavor to any dish. Chef KC Ward is often snipping one thing or another from the options.

BOTTOM: Fresh celery is added to the Buffalo Wheat Meat, a dish of lentils, cauliflower, tofu ranch and not-so-hot sauce.

Chef/Owner KC Ward answered some questions offering more insight on his personality and know-how.

Q: What's your "secret weapon" ingredient?

A: Nutritional yeast. It's deactivated yeast pulverized into powder. It has a cheese-like umami flavor.

Q: What's your least favorite food?

A: I'm not that into bitter, bitter things.

Q: What is the one cooking technique everyone should know how to do?

A: Braising – roasting slowly in a cooking liquid. It gives you time to really love the product.

Q: If you could take any celebrity chef out to dinner, who would it be

and where would you take them?

A: David Chang [founder of the Momofuku restaurant group]. He just seems like a super down-to-earth, highly skilled professional. It would be amazing to have a professional conversation with him and he'd be a good time, an interesting time at that. I'd take him to Tiger Belly Noodle Bar [in Granby]. He'd love the spot. It's some of the best meals I've had in the area; the ramen – everything – is just awesome.

Q: What is your favorite cookbook?

A: I go through a lot of whatever is frequent, contemporary, but the one that really formed me as a chef is "Elements of Taste: Understanding What We Like and Why." It's a wonderful exploration of understanding how flavors interact, tastes that push and pull. That was

a very formative book for me.

Q: What herb or spice best describes your personality?

A: Ras el hanout. It translates to everything spice. I find myself using just a whisper of it. It really brings a depth of flavor to sweet and sour compositions. And it sounds like an evil villain in a Batman movie.

Q: If you weren't a chef, what profession would you be?

A: Furniture maker. I find myself not being able to not make things. I made the tabletops at Rooster and the baguette seating there. Here I made the concrete tabletops. There's something very satisfying to me about making something functional, durable and nicely put together.

Q: What's your "go to" staple dish?

A: Avocado bowl with tahini sauce. It's what I've had for

lunch since our doors opened here. It's like a pair of jeans, it goes with everything.

Q: What do you like to cook when having guests in your home?

A: It definitely depends on the guest or the occasion. If I'm cooking at home something special is going on, like my wife's birthday and we were having another couple over. I can't resist some caviar with chive cream to go with it, a little Bellini. It's one of the most wonderful small bites you can have.

Q: It's your last meal on earth? What's on your plate?

*A: That's a tough one. At this point I don't have to be healthy, I can be gluttonous. An aged rack of lamb with some foie gras, throw some caviar on it and nice, hearty mashed tators. **WHL***

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Holiday LIFE



Opening the mind to *gratefulness*

Yoga practitioners
share their tips
for finding calm

by Mara Dresner
Staff Writer

Sure, it's the most wonderful time of the year, but between the mile-long to-do list and the crowds and the cold and all the demands on your time, it can sometimes be a challenge to be grateful, even as we have a holiday that reminds us to give thanks.

If you've ever taken a yoga class and spent a few blissful moments in savasana, you probably know that yoga can calm the mind. But even yoga instructors have to deal with long lines and traffic jams.

"Yoga teaches stillness, presence; it quiets the mind. However, it is a practice, and we are all human.

Sometimes my house is a mess, the kids are running around, the dog is barking; at the same time I'm trying to make dinner and the doorbell rings. Life can be a test of patience. At that moment I have a choice. Do I scream, or can I take a deep breath and find gratitude for this crazy life of mine? So, I bring my hand to my belly and feel the breath come into my body and then exhale and focus on letting go. Again, it's a practice, and staying focused for just a few seconds can be work in the beginning, but with practice I can take control of the thoughts and come back to stillness, feeling gratitude for

all of my many blessings," said Shelley Jansen, studio director of Bikram Yoga Glastonbury.

Jansen started her own yoga practice in 1998 while living in Australia. After moving back to the U.S. in 2000, she was introduced to Bikram Yoga and attended training in Los Angeles in 2002, opening her own studio in 2003.

While Jansen said that a Yoga Asana class can be a good place to start, you can also begin in the here and now.

Just go outside.

"Simply taking a walk in the woods and being very conscious of

the trees and the leaves can be a perfect place to start," she added.

Richard Mercer of Bikram Yoga Simsbury in Weatogue knows a little something about stress. A former full-scholarship Division 1A college football player, he previously worked as a vice president at Travelers, running an IT division.

"I've been practicing Bikram Yoga since 2004 when I was in my late 40s. I heard about it through a friend and, although I had never done yoga before, after my first class I knew it would be a lifelong practice," he said.

At the time, although he could

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Holiday LIFE

lift a lot of weight, he couldn't get his arms over his head or touch his toes.

"What I found surprising, however, was the effect yoga had on relaxing my mind. I didn't realize how much I needed the brain break as well as the stretching. I convinced my [now wife] Laurie to try it with me, and she found it helped with her neck and back pain and also with handling the stress of her job. Being able to share the experience was great," he noted.

After practicing Bikram for a few years, he decided to go for teacher training, attending a nine-week, full-time teacher training in Hawaii with more than 300 people from more than 40 countries.

"I called Laurie and told her that this was a business; we needed to open a studio. I quit my corporate job, and we opened Bikram Yoga Simsbury in 2009. Laurie went to teacher training in 2010, so we both teach," he said.

Mercer noted the benefits are far-reaching.

"You [learn to] understand the saying, 'If you are not grateful for what you have, you'll never be grateful for what you think you want.' I thought that all there was was the business, corporate world. Opening this yoga business makes me personally grateful because I believe it saved my life and has helped so many others improve their own lives," he said.

He recommends not doing too

much too soon.

"Just come in and start. Don't expect too much right away, just take your time and let it happen. A regular yoga practice allows your mind to be calm and to focus, and this creates the space for gratefulness. We always encourage our folks to appreciate the small improvements, millimeters of improvement in flexibility and strength. The peacefulness, the calmness that yoga brings, this opens the mind to gratefulness."

Julie Starr, owner of Starr Yoga in West Hartford, also noted that the postures aren't the goal.

"The practice of yoga is just one of the eight 'paths of yoga.' The physical practice helps you feel certain things that you can then apply to situations off your mat. One of these is gratitude. When you focus on your breath in class, you feel grateful for your lungs and the air that we breathe. Every morning I am thankful to be alive and have healthy organs so I can breathe comfortably. The physical poses are challenging and remind me to be thankful for my body and its ability to do the poses. When I walk my daughter to school, I am thankful that I have the ability to do so. To be able to take a yoga class and to have an hour to do something for myself, to have the means to do so, I am thankful," Starr said.

Starr said there are many paths into yoga and meditation, and you can start small. She recommends

online videos for those nervous to take a class right away, such as YogaGlo, or meditation apps such as Insight Timer and Buddhify.

"The simplest way I find to bring more gratitude in one's life is to remind yourself how lucky and thankful you are. Repeat a simple mantra when you wake up or every time you look in the mirror. It can be as simple as 'Life is good.' In life, we get back what we give out. Practice gratitude and you will receive gratitude from the world around you."

Gina Uricchio, a Rocky Hill resident who teaches at Live Right Wellness in Old Wethersfield, has been practicing for more than 15 years.

"It's a daily essential piece of my day that incorporates movement and meditation," she said. "My practice keeps me grounded and able to trust my journey in this world and that all is unfolding as it should. Practicing gratitude every day naturally changes your vibration and moods instantly. Just saying thank you is enough."

It's not that she doesn't have her challenges. She even found a way to do yoga in bed while recovering following a mastectomy.

"If I can say thank you, even if it's for the cup of coffee I'm drinking, it immediately changes my vibration. With my yoga practice I can easily bring my nervous system to a state of balance, which in turn helps me manage my emotions," she said.

Lisa Romano, who opened Glastonbury Barre and Yoga in April 2016, has only been practicing yoga for a few years.

"It was a transformative experience that went beyond the physical," she said.

Yoga helps her count her blessings, which can set the tone for the day.

She said that this is especially important when life is less than ideal.

"For people who are going through difficult times, being able to take an hour for themselves to notice their breath and their body, this might be the only time of the day to practice self-care. People often have a difficult time taking time for themselves, and dedicating an hour on the schedule to yoga solves that.

Oftentimes, the practice of yoga is combined with journaling, visualization and meditation," Romano said. "For me, personally, yoga has taught me that in any stressful situation, my breath is vital to staying in control. ... We are all going to experience traveling hassles, traffic, or bad news. Deep breathing and stretching instantly calm you down. And for that life lesson, I am grateful." **WHL**

Learn more at bikramct.com, bikramyogasimsbury.com, glastonburybarreandyoga.com, myliverightwellness.com and starrlifestudios.com.

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Holiday LIFE

Raising *grateful children* this season and all year long

by Alicia B. Smith
LIFE Staff

The holiday time rings in a number of lovely, fun and exciting

events and traditions, from decorating, baking and family visits, to religious observances and anticipation.

There is an underside to all of this good cheer, for along with all of the holiday hoopla this time of year can put an emphasis on one's sense of entitlement, and the "I want" and "give me" yearnings can be overwhelm-

ing, especially for children who are looking forward to a visit from Santa Claus or to see what may arrive for Hanukkah.

Instilling a sense of gratitude in children is possible and should be a year-round endeavor.

One of the ways to counter this seemingly me-only attitude is action. Getting children involved in activities and events outside of their circle and daily life helps them to learn that not everyone is as fortunate as they may be and, by working to improve the lives of others, they can

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Specials:

Holiday LIFE

learn to be grateful for what they have.

Students at Morley School in West Hartford participate in two annual events that help to foster a sense of community. In the fall, the entire school works to collect non-perishable food items for their Red Wagon Food Drive, a tradition that goes back more than 20 years. Just before Thanksgiving, students and staff wheel several red wagons full of items that have been collected and deliver them to the local food bank. In the spring, for the past 10 years, another parade of goods takes place, the Backpack Brigade. This time, students and staff collect new backpacks and school supplies, and once again deliver them to the town in order for them to be distributed to students in need over the summer months.

Since arriving as principal six years ago, Ryan Cleary has seen a third charitable effort begin. For the last year and a half, the school has developed a relationship with a sister

school in Haiti.

"That idea was born out of an effort to have an authentic cultural experience," Cleary said.

The focus, initially, was to collect art supplies for students in Haiti and

has broadened to assist in other ways as well.

"The reason we do all of those things is we have kids and families here with a tremendous amount of talent and a tremendous amount of compassion for the people around them," Cleary said. "We want them,

when they leave Morley, to use their talents to be active and engaged in the community. The cool thing is students build a lot of perspective and that is where the gratitude comes in."

"As we drop off

"As we drop off food at the pantry or look at a school in a third world country, the kids develop a real appreciation for the things they have in their own lives."

– Ryan Cleary

food at the pantry or look at a school in a Third World country, the kids develop a real appreciation for the things they have in their own lives. They develop a really strong sense of gratitude for the personal things they have, for their family and, really, for our community,"

Cleary continued. "In helping each other, they are learning how much it means to be around others, share happy moments; they see the different situations other kids and families are in [and] it makes them celebrate together in a more meaningful way."

With the Haiti program, which includes kindergartners through second-graders, Cleary said he has seen students recognizing the differences between their school and the one with which they are partnering.

He has heard them comment on how many books they have in their classrooms compared to what they've seen at the other school when they Skype with students in Haiti.

"Kids are having real conversations about how isn't it great we have these things and we are so fortunate to be in this spot. Kids in Haiti have no art supplies, no walls, no books in the language they speak. That was a new shift in student thinking," Cleary said.

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4/5 Giselle - Moscow Festival Ballet

4/18 Jessica Lang Dance

*Holiday* **LIFE**

"It certainly raised awareness of the situation and at the same time it created a sense of gratitude for the things we have."

While these three programs were developed at the school, Cleary said they have inspired students to do other things on their own to help make the world better. Some students have organized a fundraiser to raise money for cancer, and even the student council developed events.

The work the students have done has spread outside of the school, too, and Cleary said, during the distribution events of food and backpacks, there might be 150 students delivering the items and about 100 parents helping.

"That's the power of community," he said. "It's fantastic to see families engaged in this work right alongside their kids. What great modeling it is for the children, to see parents involved."

For many families the season's focus is on their faith, which can be an enormous source of inspiration and help to put life in perspective.

The Rev. Linda Spiers at Trinity Episcopal Church in Collinsville said for many Christians, Advent, the time leading up to the arrival of Christ on Christmas, is a period of slowing things down.

"Our liturgy slows down a bit, it's a bit more contemplative," she said.

"It's totally opposite of what the secular world tells us to do. It's fast-paced, people are decorating their homes, it's frenetic. The season of Advent is meant to slow us down, to help us think about the real meaning of the season."

Throughout the season, the church has events planned to help children and adults do more thinking. Parishioners of all ages will be asked to write down on a slip of paper what the "deep yearnings of their heart would be," and place the paper in an empty manger, which will be

brought forth in the offering during the service as a way to give thanks for all they have in their lives.

The church also will provide blank Christmas cards for children to draw on or write a note, which will be later sent out to those who are homebound.

The church also collects new socks to be distributed to Christ Church Cathedral in Hartford for its Church Street Eats program, which provides meals and clothing to the homeless.

"All of those things are giving children an opportunity and adults to really seriously think about the season of Advent versus what I want for Christmas," Spiers said. "They are thinking outside of themselves."

While the holiday season often inspires people to do good deeds, the needs are year-round, and Spiers encourages families to think of ways to help their children understand they can help at any time.

"Maybe it's just a prayer to give thanks for the food they have or to remember those who don't have any food on this day," Spiers said.

"Maybe it's just a conversation at the dinner table about what I am grateful for today, what happened today that makes me really grateful, see what happens in that conversation," she said.

"Setting time aside to have that conversation can be a challenge because not all families get to sit down for a meal together each night."

The focus on thoughts of gratitude does not have to be huge, complicated events, Spiers said.

While everyone wants peace in the world, just as important are things that occur in our daily lives. Maybe a child wants to pay more attention to their work in school, or make a resolution to get their homework done, or notice when someone else needs help. **WHL**

Holiday LIFE

Finding the light in tough times

How to be grateful
when all is not great

by Lynn Woike
LIFE Staff

It's easy to be grateful when you're in love, when you just got a big bonus, when you're healthy, when there's food on the table and when there's a new car parked in your driveway. Gratitude is not so easy when you are alone and in pain, when the cupboards are bare, when the vehicle that gets you to work needs repairs totaling two months rent and when the world seems to be crumbling.

Patricia Barone, co-founder of the West Hartford Counseling Center, has been working with adults who are struggling with life transitions, anxiety, depression, health-related issues, grief, loss and relational difficulties since 1984.

"In the short run, it may seem that what we want is what we need in order to feel more happiness and inner peace, but actually it may be just the opposite," she said. "Research supports the premise that gratitude for what we already have helps us to feel greater inner peace and happiness. The science of gratitude suggests that happiness is not a destination or a

possession; you cannot wear it or consume it. Expressing thanks and giving gratitude in the present moment for what is is what leads to greater contentment and inner peace.

"An article in the New York Times suggested that, whether or not we feel grateful, we can intentionally choose to practice gratitude and by doing that, we will raise our happiness level."

Barone suggests finding three things a day for which you feel or you can imagine feeling gratitude.

"For example, it might be a clerk's smile or a snowstorm that keeps you home from work, or the way your dog greets you. It can be as subtle as the feel of a cool breeze on a hot day, or how cozy fleece feels on your skin on a cold day," she said.

With time, "the transformative power of gratitude" will bring a sense of peace, softening the harshness of life's struggles.

Founder of Copper Beech Institute and Associate Director at Holy Family Passionist Retreat Center Brandon Nappi



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Holiday LIFE

said, "I believe that as long as we are alive, there is more right with us than is wrong with us."

By focusing on how hopelessly broken life seems, fear is stoked and "there is a temptation to catastrophize our lives ... leaving us feeling overwhelmed and paralyzed."

Bringing an alternate energy source to our challenges is helpful, he said, explaining, "Gratitude is a limitless source of energy when we feel overwhelmed by the struggles of our lives or the world. Gratitude can be a powerful resource to free ourselves from the trap of cynicism and despair. Ask yourself, 'What's right with this moment?' There's always an answer, no matter how dire the situation. The practice of gratitude immediately activates our present moment awareness. We wake up to the blessing of what has been there all along, though we may not have noticed it. It might be the presence of a friend, the smell of fallen leaves, or the familiar melody of a favorite song. Using the energy of gratitude, we can begin to bring appreciation to our lives and realize

that there is actually much to be grateful for in every moment no matter what."

A mindfulness teacher, he wrote, "Somehow the gray November horizon and the crunch of leaves underfoot inspire me to be mindful of the countless gifts I've received in my life. I have enough to eat. My persistent flaws aren't often embarrassingly visible. I have enough documentaries on my smart TV to fill two lifetimes. My tween children mostly like me," in an article for Huffpost's The Blog last November titled "Platitude of Gratitude: The Shadow Side of Being Thankful."

Gratitude – as it is practiced by the great spiritual traditions – reveals connection.

"The art of being thankful connects us to those who have given us gifts while inspiring us to be gift-givers in the world. The truth is that our well-being and the well-being of others are connected. Everything and everyone is connected to everything and everyone else," Nappi said.

Experiencing that connectedness

is one of the things that helped Eve Schreiber get through the worst times of her life.

"Life was a blur, hazy. I had a lot of different jobs because I couldn't keep one. I was raised by a single working mother, so I felt I had to live up to her independence," Schreiber said.

One morning, she showed up for work with a four-inch knife gash on her upper thigh, having no memory of it after drinking and blacking out the night before. A friend in recovery took her to rehab and she stayed.

"Attending [Narcotics Anonymous] meetings and participating in the fellowship gave me a sense of belonging. The camaraderie, the support and getting to know myself better through step work has given me a different set of eyes on myself. I got a better understanding of why I did the things I did when I used drugs," she said.

Before that self-reflection, she didn't much like life and saw nothing for which to be grateful.

"I was self-destructive. I was being reckless. I made a lot of mistakes, and

I ended serving time in jail for drinking. There you're told when to eat and when to sleep, when you're allowed to make a phone call" Schreiber said.

While in jail, she practiced gratitude. She was grateful for everything – from simple gestures of kindness, to the strength and friendship of other recovering addicts.

"When I got out, it was like a sense of privilege. I was waking up in the morning and not being told when to wake up. Driving is a privilege. Being able to use the phone and not take it for granted," she said. "I'm grateful for a second chance. It's like a do-over."

Eighteen years have passed and she still counts every blessing. Although she's recovering from surgery, is unable to work and therefore has no income, she is grateful.

"It could be worse. I could have died," she said. "I'm grateful for sunrise and sunset, waking up in my own bed. I can walk on two legs. I can use two arms. I have the gifts of sight, smell, hearing. I have a sense of gratitude. My life really isn't that bad." **WHL**



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Giving thanks across faith traditions

by Allie Rivera
LIFE Staff

With Thanksgiving rapidly approaching, many people take the time to pause and reflect on their gratitude. In various faith and cultural groups throughout Connecticut, the concept of gratitude is an important element of practice throughout the whole year.

"Amidah is one of the central prayers that we have in Judaism," explained Cantor Lauren Phillips of Congregation Beth Israel in West Hartford. "It's made up of a series of blessings. One of the blessings is the Modin prayer, this blessing of thanksgiving."

Phillips explained that the blessings said change depending on the day on which it is said, however the Modin remains constant.

"It's always included, no matter when we're saying this prayer," she said.

According to Phillips, the concept of gratitude remains important in the faith throughout the year in that it strengthens the relationship with God.

"We incorporate a constant gratitude," she said. "We offer things to God at all times of day."

Though gratitude remains the constant in the faith, Phillips said that that thankfulness goes hand-in-hand with another concept.

"The prayer for peace comes right after the prayer for gratitude," she said. "It reminds us not to take things for granted and to be grateful for the blessing that we have in life."

In Judaism, the other central holiday for gratitude came about in early October with Sukkot, a weeklong tradition that commemorates the harvest.

"We build temporary huts called Sukkahs, and we eat our meals in them. Some people even choose to sleep in them," Phillips said.

"By building these temporary structures and eating our meals in them, it reminds us that, when we emerge from the Sukkah, we remember how lucky we are to have these dwellings."

Tessa Beauregard, associate pastor at the First Church of Christ, Congregational, in Wethersfield, said the concept of gratitude is similarly important in her faith.

"Thanksgiving is an important virtue for Christians in our tradition," she said. "It's connecting the peace of God with our attitude of thanksgiving and gratitude."

According to Beauregard, practicing true gratitude for all that God has provided is not only a challenge, but often a sacrifice.

"We call thanksgiving a sacrifice," she said. "To bring yourself to a place of gratitude is hard. You're aligning your

heart with the heart of God."

Though that work may be difficult, Beauregard stressed that it is important in her faith to do so.

"God says in the psalms that that sacrifice is more pleasing to him than the Old Testament sacrifice of animals," she said.

"Whatever is happening in our lives, the attitude of gratitude is important to God."

In her own experience, Beauregard said she has found that not practicing gratitude also leads to unhappiness.

"I've noticed in myself when I go through times when I forget to be thankful and I put my focus on what's wrong, that breeds a kind of discontentment or disgruntlement," she said. "That thankfulness is a really practical way of focusing on the many good things that we do have. It's kind of a mental health thing as well. It's part of our faith, but like all matters of faith, there's something practical that comes out of it."

That idea of mindful gratitude throughout daily life is a key element of Buddhism as well. Kathy Simpson, a community dharma leader in West Simsbury, explained that the faith focuses on an open-mindedness that allows gratitude to flourish.

"With Buddhism there's kindness, doing a kindness for another

and being grateful for a kindness that's been done," she said. "I just feel like everything is a potential gift. Every person that comes into your life, every situation you encounter, there's something to be learned from everything."

While Buddhism, like most other religions, has a wide variety of practices within the faith, Simpson explained that the overall goal is to practice mindfulness at all times.

"It's an openhearted approach to everything one encounters in life," she said. "Being grateful for all of it is a side effect to the openheartedness."

Though the faith does not have specific prayers for those practicing to say, Simpson said that, through practice, life can become like a prayer.

"That openness and receptivity is part of everything that we do. In a way, I guess that's a prayer," she said. "You realize things in their essence the more mindful you are, so it becomes like a prayer."

Simpson, who has been practicing Buddhism for nearly two decades, said the faith's focus on being open to anything that comes along can only lead to gratitude.

"It's really a reverence for anything that comes our way," she said. "Anyone and anything has value that can teach. We become more appreciative as we go along." **WHL**

by Olivia Piper
LIFE Staff

Is being grateful good for you?

Showing gratitude. It may seem like a simple concept, and one that is often mentioned during the holiday season. Though we are often told that we should be grateful, how does it help us? Is being grateful good for you?

If you ask Dr. Diane Hayden, an experienced health and wellness professional and the owner and publisher of Natural Nutmeg Magazine, she will tell you exactly how being grateful is beneficial for both your physical and mental health.

"There is a special kind of magic in gratitude. It raises our consciousness, boosts our energy and enhances our self-worth," Hayden said of the mental benefits of being more grateful in everyday life.

Additionally, there are actual physical benefits to gratefulness, as people who are grateful are more likely to take care of their health and, according to Dr. Hayden, experience the physical benefits of improved sleep quality, and being better connected with one's body.

"Think of how you feel when you are grateful for something and when you say 'thank you' for something. What are the actual physical feelings you have in your body? If we can become more in tune to these feelings, we can stay in a more grateful and positive state, and it also helps you to notice when you aren't feeling well," Hayden said.

In addition to bolstering one's confidence or sleep schedule, being

grateful every day is similar to any type of habit in that it will begin to impact different areas of one's life.

"Practicing gratitude is a fundamental component of the law of attraction and learning how to manifest and create your ideal life. The theory is that, in order to bring what you want into your life, you have to be grateful for what you already have and you have to give thanks for what you receive in the future. This enables a constant flow of positive energy to go into and out of your life. If you are not thankful for what you receive, it will block the flow and you will have a difficult time attracting what you want," Hayden said.

As for how to practice gratitude, one does not have to wait for a gift-giv-

ing holiday or birthday, but can instead begin to notice and note the small moments in each day that bring joy and thankfulness. Hayden said that one way to achieve this is through a 'gratitude jar,' which involves writing down one thing that you are grateful for at the end of every day and placing it into a large jar. Then, at the end of one year, or in a time of need, you are able to read every note and recognize the enormous amount of things you have for which to be grateful.

"I think this is a great exercise because there are so many great things that happen on a day-to-day basis that you forget about things that you would be grateful for ... so this is the perfect way to remind you of all of those moments," Hayden said. **WHL**



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Slice of LIFE

photos by Lisa Brisson



Town-sponsored Veterans Day Ceremony

It was standing room only as veterans, their friends and families as well as strangers who just wanted to thank them for their service gathered Saturday, Nov. 11 in the Meeting Room at First Church of Christ Congregational during the annual town-sponsored Veterans Day Ceremony. **1.** Veteran Ken Hungerford of American Legion Hayes-Velhage Post 96 bows his head in prayer during the West Hartford Veterans Day ceremony. **2.** Keynote speaker Andrew Clapsaddle, principal of Sedgwick Middle School and a U.S. Marine veteran. **3.** Mayor Shari Cantor spoke as well. **4.** The Top of the Sixes choral group from Sedgwick Middle School sing the national anthem, under the direction of Melissa Dzen. **5.** Peter Roe of American Legion Hayes-Velhage Post 96 plays "Taps" to end the Veterans Day ceremony. **6. & 7.** The memorial wreath was presented by Eagles Scouts from Troop 163 Chris Stimson and Graham Douglass. **8.** The West Hartford Police Department Honor Guard under the command of Lt. Christopher Chappell. **9.** The Honor Guard of the American Legion Hayes-Velhage Post 96 under the command of Rocky Goodwin.





Improving children's health

Nonprofit statewide institute has a new president and CEO

by **Alicia B. Smith**
Associate Editor

Jeffrey Vanderploeg inherited a thriving organization that began with one employee to one that now has 30. He is continuing a tradition that has as its goal to develop better and improved health systems for children in Connecticut.

In October, Vanderploeg, a resident of West Hartford, was named president and CEO of the Child Health and Development Institute of Connecticut Inc., based in Farmington.

Vanderploeg was long familiar with the organization established in 1999 and funded by the Children's Fund of Connecticut. He is the organization's second head, following Judith Meyers who was the only

employee when she began at CHDI.

Vanderploeg's work with the organization began in 2009. While receiving his postdoctoral training at Yale University he began to work one day a week at CHDI and soon came on fulltime. Since then he has served as vice president for Mental Health Initiatives.

The CEO earned his Ph.D. in clinical psychology from Bowling Green State University, and his predoctoral and postdoctoral training from Yale University.

A press release announcing his promotion stated, "Over the past 10 years, Vanderploeg has demonstrated tremendous leadership and played a central role in developing effective policies, systems and practices for prevention and treatment

of mental health conditions among children, adolescents and their families."

CHDI, Vanderploeg said, is not a direct service agency. Rather, he said, "We work directly with the people who work directly with clients."

Ultimately, the organization works to improve the quality of care of children in the state in need of mental health services with the focus on three areas: health, mental health and early childhood – children age 5 and younger who have specific needs compared with other children.

"We also do a lot of work on the policy side," Vanderploeg said.

CHDI's mission is to improve the quality of mental health care

Jeffrey Vanderploeg is the new President and CEO of the Child Health and Development Institute of Connecticut.



Courtesy photos

for children and teens. This is accomplished through offering training, collecting data on outcomes, and working directly with clinics and clinicians. The nonprofit organization is a subsidiary of the Children's Fund of Connecticut.

"We have a fragmented mental health system," Vanderploeg said, "It's difficult to understand, it's difficult to know where to go; the kinds of services you receive can depend on where you come into the system: through DCF or law enforcement."

CHDI works on three specific areas: reforming policy, strengthening the systems in Connecticut and improving practices. The organization partners with schools, hospitals and organizations that serve children.

Since his time with CHDI, Vanderploeg has been encouraged by the growing awareness of mental health issues as well as the recognition of the impact of trauma on a child.

"It's good people are thinking of mental health," he said, however the systems in place to serve children who need mental health services have to be able to meet those needs.

CHDI works to ensure that children have access to the help they need when they see their pediatrician or are referred through their school.

The organization developed Mobile Crisis Intervention Services, in which a counselor is available 24/7 to respond to mental health emergencies, typically in less than 30 minutes.

"We saw almost a tripling in call volume" after the call time was reduced, Vanderploeg said.

"We saw an increase in mobile services, we are very excited about that project," he said.

He was instrumental in co-developing the Connecticut Children's Behavioral Health Plan.

"Since the plan was presented to the General Assembly in October 2014, it has remained a significant guiding framework for system development and integration across health, behavioral health, juvenile justice, education and other child-serving systems," the release stated.

The Children's Behavioral Health

"The earlier you can identify those problems, the better those outcomes over time."

—Jeffrey Vanderploeg

Plan, an initiative supported by Vanderploeg, lays the framework for how the organization can improve creating links between pediatricians and schools with the mental health services in the state. The focus is to provide the tools so pediatricians and schools can identify mental health needs and to improve coordinating the school and mental health services.

"I believe evidence-based care

is critical," Vanderploeg said.

To that end, he co-developed a program, which works to prevent juveniles with mental health issues who are non-violent from being diverted directly into the criminal justice system. He said as many as 20 percent of students are referred to juvenile court. A student who has mental health issues and who acts

out in school is likely to end up in the juvenile court system and often ends up with them dropping out of school all together.

"SBI was developed to disrupt that school-to-prison pipeline," Vanderploeg said.

To do that, CHDI developed a model for which they have created a professional development program for school personnel as well as

alerting schools to the behavioral health services that are available – such as the Mobile Crisis Services – rather than calling the police. Finally, the organization helps schools develop new codes of conduct so they can directly address the behavior.

Since the program began in 2009 there has been between a 30 percent to 50 percent reduction in the juvenile referrals. The program has worked with 37 schools, particularly those with higher arrest rates for students; it hopes to add 10 more.

Right now the work CHDI has done is based in the state, however, Vanderploeg said the work they do can be applied on a national level to improve access, improve quality and improve outcomes, he said.

A big part of that is to identify issues early as well as offer early intervention.

"The earlier you can identify those problems, the better those outcomes over time," Vanderploeg said. **WHL**

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KEITH TURLEY, Publisher

EDITORIAL

Abigail Albair, Executive Editor

aalbair@turleyct.com

Lynn Woike, Editor

John Fitts, Assistant Editor

Alicia B. Smith, Associate Editor

STAFF WRITERS

Allie Rivera, **Mara Dresner**,

David Heuschkel

ADVERTISING SALES

Lisa Oster-Zippin

lisa@turleyct.com,

860-264-5652

PAGE DESIGNERS

Daniel Kornegay, **Cynthia Martel**,

GRAPHICS DEPARTMENT

Barbara Ouellette, Production Manager

ads@turleyct.com, 860-264-5523

Maureen LaBier, Production Assistant

Daniel Kornegay, **Cynthia Martel**,

Kathy Kokoszka, **Mary Grimes**

CIRCULATION

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Writer's block

An attitude of gratitude

by **Lynn Woike**

Editor

The moon. The smell of the tie-dyed sheets on my bed that had hung on the line to dry. Fresh flowers. Silence. Random acts of kindness. A job. The cat purring. Dinner with dad. Safe travel. The ocean. Laughter.

These are among the thousands of entries I have made in the daily gratitude journals I've been keeping for more than 15 years.

I began when my life was falling apart. Somehow I knew I needed to focus on something other than the scary, stressful, depressing happenings, so I would not go to sleep until I could name three things for which I was grateful. Some nights it took longer than others. It was a deliberate practice to seek out nuggets of goodness and celebrate them.

At first it was difficult. Now I can fill multiple pages.

While thankfulness, appreciation and gratitude are words often used interchangeably as a reaction to life's goodness, they are not the same. Giving thanks and appreciating something tend to be associated with words or a gesture. They're reactions, typically triggered by an action. Gratitude is a feeling that comes from a deeper level. It's a sense of being. While thankfulness can be the first step, gratitude involves emotion. It's as if my heart swells. Love flows. Negativity dissolves.

One of the biggest lessons I learned was that

happiness did not trigger gratitude, but rather, that gratitude triggered happiness.

Books by Louise Hay and Wayne Dyer became my guides.

At first, I swore at Louise for claiming, "It's only a thought, and a thought can be changed." She made it sound so simple. It took years before I understood two things that made me a believer: simple and easy are not the same thing, and it was best if I didn't believe everything I thought – especially what I thought late at night or after a few drinks.

I also fussed at Wayne Dyer for claiming, "If you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change" because no matter how I looked at it, my life was still a tragedy. I didn't want to be told the half-empty glass was half full, or that the stumbling block was a stepping stone.

But with years of shifting my focus to grateful instead of grief, I proved it worked. Long before "The Secret" came out, I realized I could attract what I focused on. Red lights when I was in a hurry or more bills than I could afford. Like exercising a muscle, it got stronger. I could get a parking space in front of where I wanted to go with money in the meter. What I had became enough. The more gratitude I cultivated, the less effort life demanded and the more gifts I was given.

I stopped taking little, routine, ordinary things for granted: a smile, a friend I

could call, a healthy body, a comfortable bed, air conditioning.

Gratitude allowed me to turn denial into acceptance, leftovers into a feast and problems into opportunities. I felt showered in blessings, and for that I was even more grateful.

Until I got smacked again, hard, sending me back to living a tragic life. I was angry, sad and fearful. For the better part of a year, I threw myself a pity party even though family and friends stopped coming. Then one day, I found myself back in the groove. I found a book a friend had given me a decade earlier, "Appearances: Clearings Through the Masks of Our Existence" by Rusty Berkus. A quote grabbed me: "Wherever you are is exactly where you are supposed to be, no matter how things seem to appear."

I surrendered my expectations and practiced some extreme gratitude. As I stopped focusing on what was missing from my life, my despair seemed to dissipate just enough that I could better deal with the adversity. I could see glimmers of new beginnings that had been disguised as painful endings.

Life became about the journey and not the destination. It became my practice to accept everything with grace and gratitude.

Oh, I still get punched, and some clouds don't have silver linings. But I have found the power that comes from a place of gratitude ... and it brings me peace. **WHL**

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BY MARK DIXON
WFSB METEOROLOGIST [AMS]



First, Winter Storm Names...

Naming winter storms is unique to WFSB, dating back to the days of the Travelers Weather Service. It's a tradition that started in 1971, that our station is proud to carry on today!

Names are easy to remember, especially the ones that have

been attached to Connecticut's biggest winter storms. If you've lived in Connecticut long enough you'll remember Blizzard Larry (the Blizzard of '78); or, perhaps the big ice storm of December 1973 named Felix. In this decade, there was Storm Alfred in late October of 2011 when heavy, wet snow caused a record power

outage. And, it was Blizzard Charlotte that dumped up to 40" of snow on the state in 2013.

In order for a storm to get a name, it has to meet certain criteria: we must expect at least 6" of snow for much of the state, and/or ½" of ice accretion (a significant ice storm).

When it comes to the list

of names, past themes have included "former First Ladies" and notable sports figures with ties to Connecticut. For this season, we had our team of reporters (since they're the ones having to be live from the field, 'in' the storms) provide 2 names each for a letter of the alphabet and then let our viewers vote on Facebook. [WHL](#)

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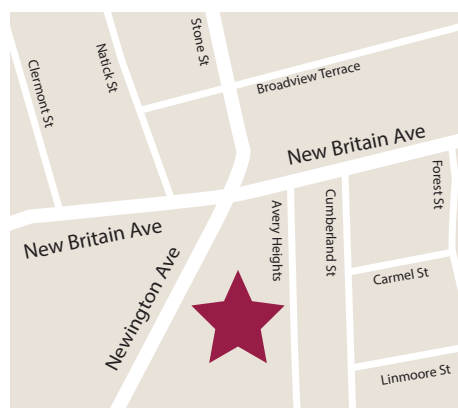
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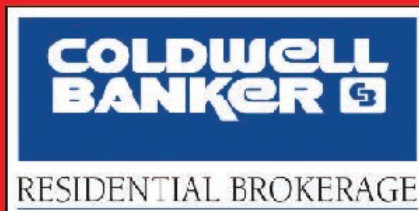
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